





# THE AWAKENING

## A PLAY

BY

MARY WHITE OVINGTON

PRICE 25 CENTS.

Five copies for one dollar.

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT  
OF COLORED PEOPLE

70 FIFTH AVENUE  
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MARY WHITE OVINGTON.



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*There is a charge of five dollars royalty on each performance of this play. Returns to be made to the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, 70 Fifth Ave., New York.*

## CHARACTERS.

Edward Marston, a young lawyer

Cyril

John

Albert

Helen Ray

Thelma

Beatrice

Jane, a young woman

A young man

William Jones, Sheriff of Casper Co., Georgia

Caesar Smith, escaped from Casper Co.

Mrs. Carter

Mary

Mrs. Allen

Mrs. Boyd

Mr. Harris

Mr. Campbell

Mr. Duncan

Fannie Landers, laundress

Jimmy

His girl

Miss Norton, a white teacher

Portly Man

Reverend George Todd

Judge

District Attorney

Clerk of the Court

Sergeant at Arms

Three policemen

Men and women, chiefly colored, in the audience at the  
court scene.

Chorus (*preferably of children*).

Members of the  
Caldwell Social  
Club

Workers  
N. A. A. C. P.

## SCENES

ACT I. Living Room of Mrs. Ray's Home.

ACT II. Headquarters of the Caldwell Branch of the  
National Association for the Advancement  
of Colored People.

ACT III. Court Room.

ACT IV. The same as Act I.

TIME: Autumn of the year 1922.

Two weeks are supposed to elapse between Act I  
and Act II.

One week is supposed to elapse between Act II  
and Act III.

Act III and IV occupy the same day.

# THE AWAKENING

## ACT ONE.

SCENE: A room in Mrs. Ray's house. The exit rear, left side. The room is furnished with ten chairs, two tables, a victrola, a secretary's book and gavel, a few magazines, etc. There are ten young colored people present. Their leader is Edward Marston, a good looking young man, who, when the curtain goes up, is standing over the victrola which is playing a rollicking piece of dance music. Some of the young people are dancing; Cyril and Thelma are sitting in a corner absorbed in one another. There is the sound of a boisterous good time as the victrola sings out its ragtime. Helen Ray is standing near Edward watching him.

### EDWARD

Here she goes, here's the last tune of the evening before business begins. All dance your prettiest. Get Cyril and Thelma out of the corner there.

*(No one goes to the corner or pays any attention to him. As a couple comes near he puts his foot out and they trip a little. The man gives him a good-natured punch with his elbow and goes on with his dance. "Stop your kidding," he calls above the music as he whirls his partner away. Three or four sing the tune as it is ground out on the victrola. Edward begins to take dancing steps and faces Helen, putting out his hands to swing her into the dance. She shakes her head. Making his way through the dancers, Edward goes into the corner and snatches up Thelma dancing off with her. Cyril rises as if to pursue them and looks on grinning. Helen stands quite still by the victrola, smiling now and then but with a troubled look upon her face. The record ends and the dancers drop into near seats.)*

EDWARD

*(Standing in the background)* To work, my young friends, to work. The Caldwell Social Club will now hold its business meeting.

*(Helen, in the meantime, directs Cyril and Albert how to put the room in proper order. A table is placed in the middle toward the front, with a chair behind it for the president. Another chair is put at the side for the secretary. Helen's secretary's book and a gavel are on the table. Edward comes forward.)*

EDWARD

Madam Secretary. *(He places a chair very ostentatiously for Helen who sits and then he sits himself with assumed gravity. He strikes the table with his gavel.)* I call the meeting to order. Miss Thelma Jackson will please put up her vanity bag while the minutes are being read.

*(Thelma, who has been using her vanity bag, makes a mouth at Edward, goes on powdering her nose for a few seconds while he frowns indignantly at her; then she shuts up her bag.)*

The meeting having now come to order, the secretary will please read the minutes of the last meeting.

HELEN

*(Rising and reading from her book)* The Caldwell Social Club held its regular monthly meeting at the home of Miss Thelma Jackson on Tuesday, March 20. We played bridge and had supper. The secretary reported fifteen dollars in the treasury. There was no business and the meeting adjourned. Respectfully submitted, Helen Ray, Secretary.

EDWARD

I hope, my friends, that you all notice the succinctness of our esteemed secretary's report. I know you all appreciate our method instituted by your president, of



pleasure first and business afterwards. Never while this citizen holds office (*he pats himself on the chest*) will business be allowed to interfere with pleasure. You have heard the report of the secretary, what is your pleasure?

CYRIL

I move it be accepted as read.

THELMA

I second the motion.

ALBERT

I third it.

BEATRICE

Stop your kidding or Helen will murder you with a look.

EDWARD

(*Rapping with his gavel again*) Come to order. The motion to accept the secretary's report has been moved and seconded. Do I hear any discussion? No? If not all in favor will signify it by saying Aye. Opposed No. The Ayes have it. The motion is carried.

(*No one has taken the trouble to say either Aye or No.*)

EDWARD

Do I hear any other motion?

ALBERT

(*Rising*) I move we—

HELEN

(*Rising*) If you move that we adjourn, no other motion will be in order and I have something important to bring up.

(*Edward and Cyril groan. The others look bored except Thelma who seems interested.*)

ALBERT

I give way to our honored secretary only begging her not to make too prolonged and impassioned a speech as I have to prepare a senior theme before morning. (*Sits.*)

HELEN

That's the way it always is. We leave our business so late that there is no time to talk about anything worth while.

EDWARD

My dear Madam secretary, I protest. I have been talking to you all the evening. Do you mean to insinuate that I have said nothing worth while?

HELEN

(*With an indulgent smile, and then growing serious*) I surely do. You haven't said a word but nonsense.

EDWARD

(*Professing great indignation*) Impossible!

HELEN

(*Proceeding without paying any attention to his mock anger*) It isn't that you couldn't be serious, Edward, but you seem to think, and all the others, pretty nearly think with you, that being social means being silly. Well, I'm tired of being silly and unless we do something worth while, I'm going to leave the club.

(*The faces of the young people become serious. They say, interrupting one another—*)

ALBERT

No more of Helen's eats.

CYRIL

You don't meant it, Helen.

THIELMA

I'm willing to do something.

BEATRICE

(*Jumping up*) I believe Helen is right. We pretend to be of some account with our constitution and all —

ALBERT

Our by-laws, don't forget our by-laws.

BEATRICE

And our by-laws, but we don't do a single thing but dance and play cards.

JOHN

*(Large and sleepy looking)* and eat.

BEATRICE

And eat. Well, lets either do something or give up having officers *(Sits)*

EDWARD

*(Stretches his feet out under the table, getting down in his chair, and looks rather sheepish)* We must have officers, child, to look after the money and we must have money if we are to have good times.

HELEN

I'm sick of the good times. I offer my resignation *(Sits)*

CYRIL

See here, Helen, before you adopt that tragic tone, tell us what you would like us to do.

HELEN

I'd like to have the business first and do something real and then play afterwards. I'd like a club that did something for the race.

EDWARD

*(Groaning)* A race woman!

HELEN

How can I help being a race woman, I'm colored.

EDWARD

*(With much heat)* Forget about it. For the Lord's sake forget about it. White people don't go around saying to themselves every five minutes 'I'm white, I belong to the white race.' They take life as it comes without thinking about race, one way or another. That's the way I believe in taking it. I'm American. That's enough.

CYRIL

That sounds very well, Ned, but you know its rot. We do have to think about race, but one of the reasons I joined the Caldwell social club was just because I supposed, when I got here, I wouldn't be infernally up against the race problem.

EDWARD

Up against the skirt problem instead (*Glances at Thelma*).

HELEN

I know how you feel, Cyril, and how Ned feels and probably the most of you feel the same way so I'm the one to drop out.

THELMA

What would you like us to do, Helen, when we have our business meeting. You must have something in mind.

EDWARD

"Tis now the very witching time of night,  
When churchyards yawn and graves give up their dead"  
Give up your idea as quickly as you can, Nell, for we must go soon or your mother will turn us out.

HELEN

(*Rises, evidently embarrassed knowing that the feeling will be against her*) I want to have the club join in the drive of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People.

CYRIL

(*Rising*) I move the meeting adjourn (*Sits*).

JOHN

(*Rising*) I second it (*Sits*).

EDWARD

Are you ready for the question?

BEATRICE

See here, I think we ought not to adjourn until Helen has a chance to say what she thinks.

EDWARD

A motion to adjourn is undebatable. All in favor say Aye.

CYRIL and PETER

Aye.

EDWARD

All opposed, No.

THELMA and BEATRICE

No.

JOHN

No! Anybody who gave us that chicken salad ought to have a chance to talk.

EDWARD

The noes have it. Miss Ray you have the floor.

HELEN

(*Remains standing during the vote*) It's nice up here in Caldwell, where nearly everybody is decent to you, to forget about the problem. But it isn't fair to the people who are in it all the time, who can't forget it. We ought not to be having a good time and doing nothing for them.

BEATRICE

Whom do you mean?

HELEN

I mean the people down South.

JANE

My mother comes from the South and she's always telling us how nice it was.

BEATRICE

Is she going back there?

JANE

No, I guess not.

HELEN

Mrs. Carter called on me yesterday, she's one of the captains in the drive, and left some of her literature, and truly I couldn't sleep all night.

EDWARD

*(Emphatically)* You shouldn't read that stuff.

HELEN

I ought to, and so ought you, and we ought to work with the Association to stop the awful things that are happening. It's mean for us to stand aside and not help. We're in the north where it's safe to agitate and to work against lynching and peonage, and then we're young and starting out in life.

EDWARD

That's just the reason I don't want to have anything to do with it. I'm starting out, as you say. So are you, Helen. You've got a good position in the public schools. Cyril here is awfully popular with the white fellows at college. We don't want to get messed up with the riff-raff of the race.

HELEN

It isn't riff-raff.

EDWARD

Yes it is. Once in a while they lynch a respectable citizen but not often.

HELEN

Once in a while! How would you like to be lynched once in a while?

CYRIL

*(Rising, speaking good-naturedly)* I call the meeting to order. Let us appoint a committee to take up this matter and report at the next meeting *(Sits)*.

THELMA

*(Rising)* I second the motion *(Sits)*.

HELEN

You know it will be no use that way. The drive will be over by the next meeting.

EDWARD

No it won't. Drives are like a woman's work, there're never done. I appoint Helen and Cyril and Thelma on that committee.



JOHN

(*Waking up from a long browse*) I move we adjourn.

HELEN

You haven't accepted my resignation yet.

CYRIL

We're doing something. See, we're appointing a committee.

EDWARD

The meeting stands adjourned (*Starts Home Sweet Home on the phonograph*).

(*The others rise and begin to chat with one another. Helen occupies the centre of the table, her secretary's book under her hand.*)

CYRIL

(*Going up to Helen*) Well, goodbye Helen, we'll hold a committee meeting pretty soon.

HELEN

Goodbye.

THELMA

Goodbye (*Kisses Helen*).

JOHN

Goodbye. Don't lie awake all night over this. It don't pay.

HELEN

Goodbye, John.

(*The hats and outer wraps are in the hall. Some of the young people put theirs on there and then come in and call out goodbye to Helen. She replies to them all, but does not go with them to the hall. Edward, too, remains at the victrola and the young people, Cyril, Beatrice, giving little nods in the direction of the two, get away at last, the victrola still grinding out Home Sweet Home. When the last one has gone Edward stops the victrola and comes over to Helen.*)

EDWARD

Helen, child, you're getting too serious. A girl mustn't be too serious.

HELEN

(*Turning on him sharply*) No? I suppose she must leave all the seriousness to you.

EDWARD

I'm serious enough at my business, you know that, but when I come here I like to drop it all.

HELEN

Yes, I know.

EDWARD

And as to those awful things in the South, I know there're awful but the Negroes there ought to get up and come North where they can get some sort of justice.

HELEN

But when they come North I've heard you complain because some of them are uncultivated people who don't always behave well in the street and don't keep their boots shined and aren't dandies like you.

EDWARD

(*With an embarrassed laugh*) Well, they do make things harder for us northerners who have earned our place here and are thoroughly respected.

HELEN

Do you respect yourself?

EDWARD

(*Angrily*) What do you mean?

HELEN

Do you respect yourself? You come of humble people too, just as we all did.

EDWARD

Not you, Helen.

HELEN

Yes, me. A minister's family is poor enough.

EDWARD

What are you driving at?



HELEN

Oh nothing. Good night.

EDWARD

*(With complete change in manner and for the first time this evening showing his finer side)* See here, Helen, I'm not so unsympathetic as I talk. I do feel keenly for the men and women who are denied justice and lynched. I often think about it. And I appreciate your interest and sympathy in it all. You know I do.

HELEN

Yes, I know you can feel seriously or I wouldn't have been engaged to you.

EDWARD

You're my girl, Helen, I love you more than anything else in the world. I'd work my head off for you. But I can't go with you in this N.A.A.C.P. work.

HELEN

Why not?

EDWARD

Because it would take too much time. Because I've got to work hard, to give all my best strength to making a home for you.

HELEN

But I don't want —

EDWARD

*(interrupting her)* I want you should have everything you need, and lots of things you don't need. *(With a little laugh)* I've got my job cut right out for me here in Caldwell. I am beginning to get in with the right people. A man must look out for himself.

HELEN

And never think about others?

EDWARD

I'm thinking about others. Ask John who was just here if I didn't get him the best sort of a job the other day. Easy work and a fat check every pay-day.

HELEN

That's a fine way to serve your fellow-man.

EDWARD

*(Getting angry again)* If you weren't crazy from reading all that lynching and peon stuff you'd see what I mean. I mean that a man ought to take care of things near home. Help his family, make a home for his wife, help his friends. I'm doing this the best way I know how. That's my job.

*(Helen does not answer but moves over to the victrola and starts putting things to right a little listlessly. Edward regards her uneasily but remains where he is. Suddenly he bursts out)*

Besides it might hurt me in my work.

HELEN

What work?

EDWARD

You know as well as I do that I'm thick in politics. And in the Democratic Party. I don't want to be dragging in lynching and peonage every other minute. If I can make things decent in this town, get jobs for colored people, help the man who gets run into jail at night and hasn't a friend but me, I'm as useful as if I were working for those peons in Arkansas they're making such a cry about.

HELEN

I'm glad you told it to me as straightforwardly as that. I'd suspected it for some time. You've sold yourself.

EDWARD

*(Laughing and assuming his careless manner)* Don't be melodramatic. *(He tries to kiss her but she repulses him.)*

HELEN

You've sold yourself.

EDWARD

*(Very seriously)* What do you mean? I've played a straight, honest game.

HELEN

Very well, perhaps it is. But it isn't my game. We can't play it together. We part company tonight.

EDWARD

Helen, you don't know what you're saying.

HELEN

Yes, I do. I know just what I'm saying. I don't want you to work for me. I can take care of myself. Yes, and I can take care of others too. I'll never bind myself up so that I can't work for the poorest child in the poorest place in the world.

EDWARD

You don't understand.

HELEN

Yes, I do. That's just what I do. I understand. And we can't go together any more. *(She pulls off her engagement ring and hands it out to him. He does not touch it but just stares at her.)*

EDWARD

You don't mean what you say. You won't throw me over this way.

HELEN

I mean every word. I won't go with you any more. I've done with the Caldwell social club and its worthy president.

EDWARD

*(Now angry in a quiet, still fashion)* Indeed. I am glad to know just how you feel. *(Takes the ring and goes out into the hall. In a moment he reappears with his hat in his hand)* I wish you good evening.

HELEN

Good evening.

*(Edward bows and goes out. You hear the front door slam behind him. Helen, left alone, pushes back the table and puts the chairs in place. A voice calls from above.)*

MRS. RAY

Helen!

HELEN

Yes, Mother.

MRS. RAY

Has everybody gone?

HELEN

Yes, Mother.

MRS. RAY

Then come up, dear.

HELEN

In a few minutes, mother.

MRS. RAY

Is anything the matter?

HELEN

Oh, no nothing. Go to bed, dear, I'll be up presently.

MRS. RAY

Well, good night. I'll leave the light in the hall.

HELEN

Good night. (*Helen moves about the room again, and then turns all the lights out but one. When she has the room to her liking she sits down in a large chair, her face to the audience, and rests her head upon her hand. In a little time she wipes her eyes and you see that she is weeping.*) We've known one another such a long time and he's such a dear fellow (*wipes eyes*) but I couldn't be tied for life to a man who only wanted me to amuse him. If he would only face life, only learn about things, he would act differently. What a lot of good he could do! (*She wipes her eyes again and for a few seconds sits quite silent, her hands in her lap. There is a faint noise in the hall, as of an opening door. Helen starts and stands.*)

HELEN

(*Softly*) Is that you, Ned? (*There is no answer. It is silent again. She moves toward the door and then moves back—afraid to go further.*)

HELEN

Is anyone there?

*(There is a sound again and a man appears in the doorway. He is dressed in clothes that are wrinkled and dirty. He stands in the shadow and Helen can distinguish very little. She starts to cry out but ends in a little choke for the man holds up his hand and says pleadingly)*

SMITH

Don't make a noise, don't gib me up.

HELEN

What do you mean? Who are you?

SMITH

Caesar Smith, Ma'am, from Georgia. Don't gib me up. Dey's after me.

HELEN

Who are after you?

SMITH

De sheriff, Ma'am. He come all de way up ter ketch me. He bin on my trail ter day. Reckon he'll git me. But don't gib me up.

HELEN

Tell me what you did.

SMITH

No'tin ma'am, no'tin. No'tin but what you is doin now, guardin' yo'r home. But I won't hurt yo'. I needs help. I aint doin' no man harm nor no woman.

HELEN

*(Seeing that he is sadly shaken loses her fear and goes over to where he stands)* Sit down, I'm not afraid. But you must tell me what has happened and why the sheriff wants you.

*(The two sit. The one light in the room is on Smith's face.)*

SMITH

Dis aint no pretty tale, Miss, fer you ter hear. You eber libed Souf?



HELEN

No, but I've read about some of the things that happen there, the way the white people keep the Negroes on the plantations in debt and then the lynchings.

SMITH

Yes, Ma'am, and dere's anudder ting. Ef sumpin wrong happens, ef some white man is shot at by a nigger, or some white gal gits hurt, dey don cyah whever dey punish der right nigger or der wrong one, don make a bit o' diff'ence, so long as dey hurt some one and has dere fun. Well, down my way, a white gal were—well, hurt badly, miss. Nobody knowd who done it. Dey don' know ter dis day though it look like it were a white man got a grudge agin her father. But de white folks, an' specially dose ole Ku Klux, dey must hit on somebody so dey hits on me.

HELEN

Oh!

SMITH

I had a right nice li'll place. Chickens and a hog an' a nice patch er sweet pertatoes. An' I owned it, too. Dey didn't like dat. I was getting biggerty, dey says. What was dat? (*He starts at a sound he alone hears.*)

HELEN

It was nothing, Mr. Smith, nothing. I am sure you need not be afraid here.

SMITH

I won't neber be sure er myself agin, miss. I don' spect eber to be safe. You can't know ef you aint never been down dar. I was in der swamp two days, hidin' from the dogs, der mud up ter my elbows, I was dat hongry I could feel de wolf tearin' at my insides. But dat warn't der worst. I was feared ob de fire dat burns slow, slow while dey sits around to watch an' hear yer scream. Dat's what I feared.

HELEN

But what did you do?

SMITH

No'tin, aint I tellin' yo' I didn't touch der gal. Got one er my own. But dey cum ter my house and ordered me out an' I jes wouldn't go.

HELEN

Who comes?

SMITH

Aint I tellin' yer, Dey comes, dese Ku Klux.

HELEN

The Ku Klux?

SMITH

Yas'm, Dey tells me agin ter come out, an' I don' go. And dey calls agin: "We're wantin' yer, Caesar!" An' I don' go. An den dey pounds at de do'. It aint easy ter break. I stands dar, watchin' fer 'em ter git in. (*He rises at this and tells his story dramatically, crouching with imagined gun in hand*) I jes watches, Miss, an' when dey break de do' I shoots de firs' one dat comes in.

HELEN

You shot?

SMITH

Yes ma'am, I shoots and he falls, his ole white sheet wrap about him. He wasn't dead, cos I seed him atterwards. But dey don no more come in jes den. Dose Klu Klux, dey aint much alone, dey has to hunt in crowds. When I gits my gun on de second one, he goes out. An' I goes too, out der back do'.

HELEN

Was anyone in the house with you?

SMITH

No, thank de Lord. Ma and Lindy was away visitin' her folks. Lindy wanted ter take her kitten. I wish she had. Dere aint nottin' lef' ob dere place, not a pertater in der ground, or a shingle on der roof—eberyting gone. Dey set fire ter de heap, spectin' me ter

be in it. But I had gone a good stretch an' purty soon I heard der dogs.

Eber heard bloodhounds? (*Helen shakes her head.*) Dey aint bad dogs, but dey sure is put to der debil's use. I heard 'em baying, baying, an' I went to der swamp and stayed der trou de night an' in de mornin' I went in deeper, deeper, so dey couldn't fin' me. Cat-briers wrop around yo', dead trees where yo' sink deep down in der rot, and der ants, millions ob dem, run about yo' feet. Gnats an' moskeeters buzzing tru de day an' screaming tru de night an' de white man standin' waitin' fer yo' to get out. (*He stops in his story and looks upward*) But de stars was dar, de lamps of heaven. De stars dey sabel me, Miss. I followed de North star like de slaves did in de ole days. An' all de way along I found friends. Seemed like dere's a heap ob kind people in der world. (*He stops and looks at her steadily.*)

#### HELEN

And you will find a friend here, Mr. Smith, I'll help you in any way that I can.

#### SMITH

I hopes yo' will, Miss, I's been tru a heap ob trouble. I don' look like what I did at home. I wisht you could hab seen my li'll home. Honeysuckle on de front poch an' Ma alays keepin' everything swep up. And Lindy, de prettiest li'll trick playin' about the yard wid her kitty. Dat waz my home an its gone. (*He sinks back in his chair with a helpless gesture. Helen looks at him and wipes the tears from her eyes. They hear a slight sound. Caesar starts up. Helen goes to the hall to lock the door and is confronted by a man. She pushes the switch and turns on the light full force. She sees a white man, rather good-looking, lean, with sharp features*) (*Rises, terrified*) Dats him, I said they waz after me.

#### JONES

(*Showing his pistol*) Well, I got you at last, Caesar, and a pretty chase you've led me. Thought you could get off up here, eh? We'll see about that. I've a warrant against you. You're charged with murder.



*(Smith's head drops and he turns to follow the sheriff but they both are confronted by Helen who stands in the doorway)*

HELEN

Leave that man alone, you've no right to enter this house.

JONES

Well, I'll be damned. What sort of a nigger wench is this?

HELEN

Leave that man alone. *(Turns to Smith)* Don't you go with him, Mr. Smith.

JONES

Mr. Smith, that's a good one *(Takes hold of Caesar and pushes him toward the door)*.

HELEN

*(Runs to the telephone which is in the hall. You hear her calling)* Central, The Police Department. Yes, this is 20 Chestnut Street. A man has forced entrance—Come at once. *(Sheriff stops with Caesar who has made no attempt to escape him. Speaks as Helen returns)*

JONES

That's all right, my girl. I hope your police will come. They'll save me trouble.

HELEN

Don't worry, they'll come. *(To Caesar)* Don't be discouraged, Mr. Smith, you aren't in the South.

JONES

No, but he soon will be.

HELEN

You mustn't be too sure of that.

JONES

What's to prevent it?

HELEN

We'll all prevent it. We won't let him go back to be lynched.

JONES

*(With a little laugh)* Lynched, why, he'll get a fair trial all right.

HELEN

A fair trial in Georgia!

JONES

*(Menacingly)* See here, you'd better drop this sort of gab with me. You're nothing but a nigger, and you want to keep your place.

HELEN

*(Who is trembling all the time but who keeps up from the excitement of the situation)* You had better keep your place. You've no right entering my home and I'll have you arrested for it.

JONES

I'll be damned.

*(The sheriff takes a quid of tobacco from his pocket, cuts off a piece and begins to chew. His eyes never leave Caesar who has no opportunity to escape. There is a ring at the door. Helen runs to open it and ushers in two policemen.)*

HELEN

Officers, arrest this man *(pointing to the sheriff)* he has entered my house tonight.

JONES

Easy now, friends, easy. *(He shows his badge and papers)* This is a very high class nigger establishment but I reckon it can't shelter criminals any better than the low down ones. This man is my prisoner, officer, needed in Georgia on a charge of assault with intent to kill.

*(The officers are policemen sent in from the nearest station. They look at the sheriff's credentials, and turning to Caesar the more important looking says)*

OFFICER

Are you Caesar Smith?

SMITH

Yas, sah.

JONES

And my prisoner.

OFFICER

(to sheriff) Go slowly, man. Cacsar Smith is a prisoner of the State and as such I place him under arrest. (*Puts his hand on Caesar and moves him to the door, the sheriff following.*)

HELEN

Don't give up hope, Mr. Smith. Don't feel that this is the end of things, it's only the beginning. You're in Caldwell, not in Georgia, and you shant leave here.

JONES

How do you make that out?

HELEN

He shant leave, we won't let him. We'll get the best lawyer in the city and we'll fight the case, we'll fight it and fight it. (*She loses her nervousness and speaks with clear ringing accents*) Don't you be afraid, we'll fight and we'll win. The State shant grant extradition. The governor won't let them take you away. I know he won't. We won't let him. We'll fight for you in the courts. Don't you understand, we'll fight to keep you with us here. You shant be taken back to be lynched. (*The men all stand and watch her amazed at her excitement and the confidence with which she speaks. At length the sheriff says with a slow drawl*)

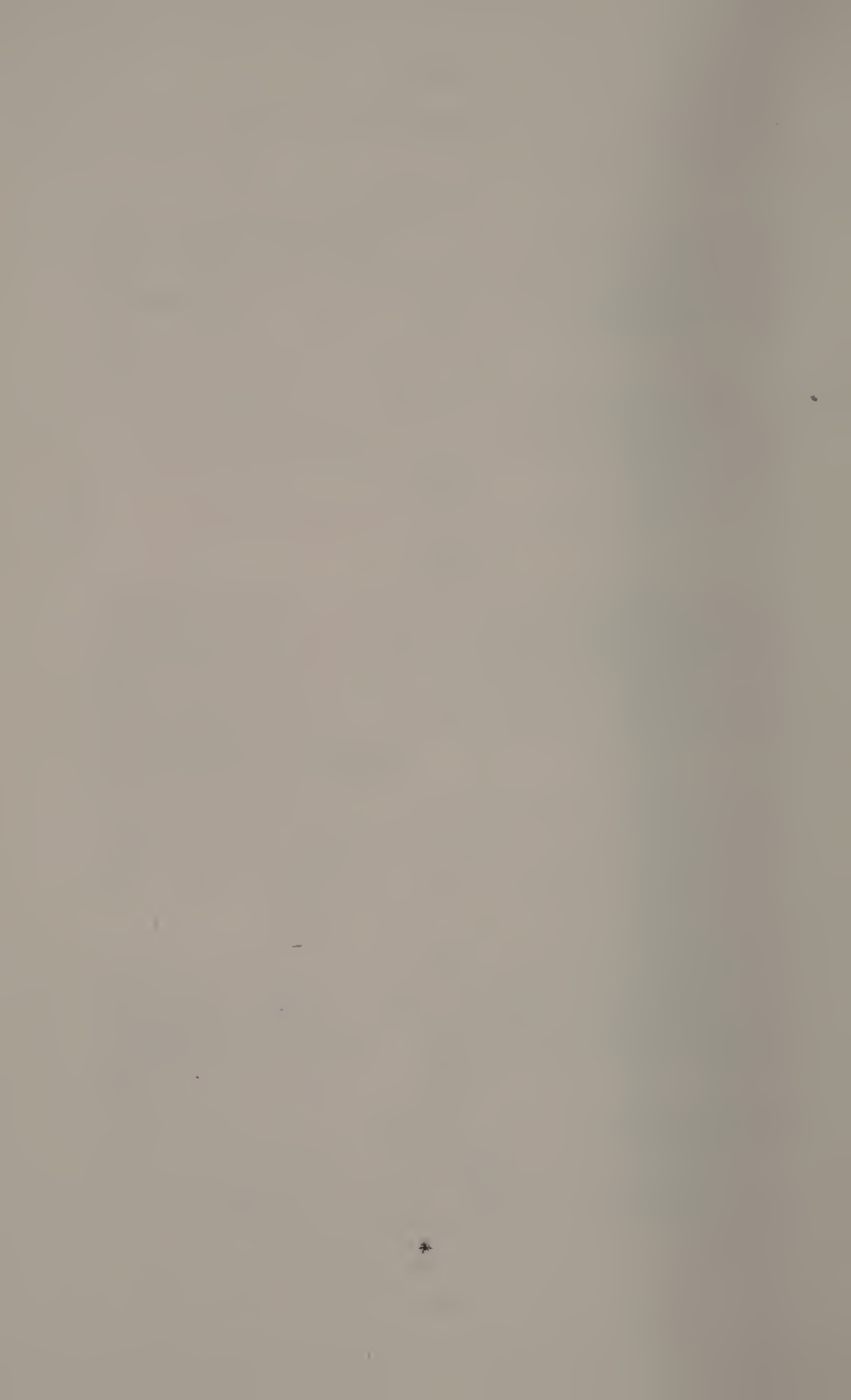
JONES

You're a high-brow colored gal all right but how do you think you're going to keep me from taking my prisoner away with me? Got a pull with the alderman, perhaps. Well, we'll see whether this aint a white man's country. You and your lawyer! Who's going to do this fine fighting?

HELEN

The National Association, that's who is going to do it. The Caldwell Branch of the N.A.A.C.P.

CURTAIN.



## ACT II.

SCENE: The headquarters of the Caldwell Branch of the N.A.A.C.P. A bare room furnished with a desk, a typewriter, tables and chairs. Literature of the Association is on a side table. A few pictures of persons prominent in the movement are on the walls. Also any posters that may seem suitable. Helen and Thelma are at one table and Mrs. Carter and Mr. Harris at another. They are busy with papers. In the centre of the room, lined up, is a chorus (*preferably children*) that is singing J. W. Johnson's "Lift Every Voice" as the curtain rises. One verse is sung before the curtain goes up. The others after it has risen.

### JANE, LEADER OF CHORUS

That's better, much better. I feel sure it will go finely for the Thursday meeting. We are all to be on hand, as you remember at quarter before eight. Is that quite clear? (*Three or four in the chorus: "Yes, we understand." Others say just "Yes"*) We can all go then, unless (*turning to Mrs. Carter*) you have something further that you want us to do?

### MRS. CARTER

(*In a brisk, efficient manner*) Nothing just now. But all remember, please that we have to raise at least a thousand dollars for Smith's case, and that we want at least two thousand members. Don't be afraid to ask for memberships. The Lord helps those who help themselves. (*"Yes, Yes," the chorus answer and all go out. Jane remains and goes over to Mrs. Carter's desk with books of receipts. Mrs. Carter looks at the books*) That's fine, Jane, I knew you would make a great lieutenant. You thought you couldn't get anyone and here you have ten members already.

### JANE

(*Smiling happily*) Yes, it isn't hard when you once get started.

THELMA

Isn't it wonderful, Helen, the way the money is coming in.

HELEN

Yes, it's all the Smith case, don't you think?

MRS. CARTER

*(Looking up from her desk)* It's you, Helen, who brought us that.

HELEN

I think Caesar Smith brought it, all the way from Georgia.

MR. HARRIS

I know I'm glad to help with my ten dollar certificate.

HELEN

Oh, how fine for you to take that out, Mr. Harris.

MR. HARRIS

Not at all. I'm glad to do it for Caesar Smith and also for our heroine who wouldn't let the sheriff carry him off but called in the police.

HELEN

It wasn't anything, really. If you had heard him when he told his story you would all have done just as I did.

THELMA

I'd have been so frightened when I saw a strange man in the house, I'd have screamed and that would have spoilt everything.

JANE

*(Turns from the door)* Coming Mr. Harris? We've got to see some more folks tonight.

MR. HARRIS

Yes, I'm coming. Good night *(As they leave a boy and his girl about eleven and ten come in)*.

HIS GIRL

*(Going up to Mrs. Carter)* We've come to join the N.A.A.C.P.



MRS. CARTER

Good!

HIS GIRL

*(Opening her pocketbook and taking out a dollar bill)*  
Here's my money *(taking out another bill)* and here's Jimmy's.

MRS. CARTER

*(To Jimmy)* I'm glad you have such a good banker.

JIMMY

Oh, I earn the money and she takes it. Got a bug on this Association now.

MRS. CARTER

*(While writing out receipts, the girl watching her)*  
She will make a good wife when she grows up.

JIMMY

I don' know. I want a little for myself *(turns out his pockets which are empty)*.

HELEN

How do you earn all this money, Jimmy?

JIMMY

Selling the Crisis.

HIS GIRL

And the.....*(Mentioning name of local colored paper. A white woman enters. Helen rises and greets her.)*

HELEN

I'm so glad to see you here, Miss Norton. *(To Mrs. Carter)* Miss Norton is the principal of my school.

MISS NORTON

I'm only too glad to come, Miss Ray. I have been working among my church people, I don't feel as though I ought to work at business, and have fifteen members for you. *(She goes to Helen's desk and Helen seats herself while Miss Norton hands out the money)* Here are six one dollar members, and here are five five dollar ones.

HELEN

That's great.

MISS NORTON

Isn't it? I am especially proud of all my judges. I have three of them, and they all said they were only too glad to join. You cant think how much this arrest of that poor colored man has stirred up the city.

MRS. CARTER

I suppose you all are just beginning to know what we have known all our lives.

MISS NORTON

Perhaps that is it.

HELEN

Well, it's different for us too. It's different seeing a man who has just escaped lynching or reading about one.

MISS NORTON

Most people haven't much imagination.

HELEN

That doesn't apply to you, Miss Norton. You have been a member ever since we started.

MISS NORTON

You certainly stirred my imagination when you had that meeting three years ago and gave those awful lynching figures. And here's my prize member (*all look*) The honorable James MacDonald, former member of congress, twenty-five dollars.

(*Helen, Thelma and Mrs. Carter all applaud.*)

MRS. CARTER

That's wonderful, Miss Norton. We'll have our publicity committee make a news story of that. It will help us a lot, won't it, Helen?

HELEN

Indeed it will.

MISS NORTON

I must be going. Are these all the receipts?



HELEN

You'll find them all there, and the money will go to headquarters to-morrow.

MISS NORTON

I am sure it will. There is nothing like the woman who isn't supposed to know anything about business to do a quick business job. Well, good night all.

MRS. CARTER

Good night.

HELEN

Good night, and thank you so much.

THELMA

Good-night.

*(Miss Norton goes out).*

JIMMY

*(Who is now at Helen's desk)* Say, Miss Ray, did the white man point a gun at you?

HELEN

No, not at me, at Mr. Smith.

JIMMY

I wisht I had been there. I always miss the fun.

HIS GIRL

I'm going to have my picture in the Crisis some day. I'm going to college.

JIMMY

Say, Miss Ray, did you have your picture in the Crisis?

HELEN

Yes, when I graduated from College.

JIMMY

Humph. Here, so long, Cutie *(Calls to girl who has received her receipt and joins him)*. It's the movies for us, now, aint it?

HIS GIRL

*(As they go out)* Let's make it sodas first. *(As they run off they crash into a woman carrying a basket.)*

FANNIE LANDERS

Is dis de office ob de Natural Association?

MRS. CARTER

Yes, this is the office.

FANNIE LANDERS

Is you de gal what took pity on dat po' man?

MRS. CARTER

No, this is the young lady into whose house Cacsar entered. (*Points to Helen.*)

FANNIE LANDERS

(*Going over to Helen*) I's jes been paid and I wants to put my money right hyar to help keep dat po' man alive. Don' you let him go Souf. I come from down dar an' I know what I's talkin' 'bout. Yes ma'am. Dey wouldn't leave so much as a bone fer de crow ter pick at. Day'd burn him as sure as you's born. I knows. (*She pulls a tatered pocketbook from her breast and takes out a soiled dollar bill*) You take dat, honey.

HELEN

Let me give you a receipt (*She hands the laundress a receipt*).

FANNIE LANDERS

What dat fo'?

HELEN

That's to say that you have given me the money.

FANNIE LANDERS

(*Laughs*) Don' I know dat? Didn't I gib it to yer just now? Don't need no paper ter tell me dat. Now don' you let him go back to Georgia. You tell him I knows and fer him not ter go back.

HELEN

We won't if we can help it. (*Exit woman.*)

(*While Fannie Landers has been talking to Helen a portly, well-dressed man has come in and put down a dollar on Mrs. Carter's desk and received a receipt. He now speaks.*)

PORTLY MAN

What do I get when I die?

MRS. CARTER

(*Enquiringly*) What do you get when you die?

PORTLY MAN

Yes, Ma'am. What do I get when I die?

MRS. CARTER

Why, nothing.

PORTLY MAN

I've paid a membership and you have given me a receipt. What are the benefits that come to me?

MRS. CARTER

This money is for the living, not for the dead.

THELMA

(*Who has been standing near the door giving out literature when the people leave*) This money is to keep people from dying.

PORTLY MAN

But do I get nothing out of it?

MRS. CARTER

Nothing but the satisfaction of having helped your race.

PORTLY MAN

Kindly return me my dollar, please. I do not give out money without the assurance of getting something back. (*Mrs. Carter returns him his dollar, too indignant to trust herself to speak, but as he goes out Thelma stops him.*)

THELMA

Your receipt, if you please.

PORTLY MAN

My receipt?

THELMA

Yes, your receipt. You don't get something for nothing. (*As the portly man fishes out the receipt and gives it to Thelma, four people, two men and two women, come*

*hurrying in. They are all lieutenants and are full of a pleasant bustle. Mrs. Allen and Mr. Campbell go to Mrs. Carter and Mrs. Boyd and Mr. Duncan to Helen.)*

MRS. ALLEN

My book is full. That makes me have forty new members in all.

MRS. BOYD

Forty, I have fifty.

MR. CAMPBELL

Here's my report, Madam Carter, Captain. Five new members.

MRS. ALLEN

Five? Is that the best you could do?

MR. CAMPBELL

It's hard for men to get members, they have so little leisure time.

MRS. ALLEN

You have a lot of time at your lodge. Why didn't you get more there? I made everyone of the Daughters of Ruth but two promise me a dollar at their last meeting.

MR. CAMPBELL

Promises are one thing and cash another.

MRS. ALLEN

When you have the promises you have to go after the cash. (*Mrs. Carter and Helen are busy during the conversation making out receipts.*)

MR. DUNCAN

I go Campbell a cipher better. I have 50 members.

HELEN

(*Looking up from where she is signing receipts*)  
That's fine Mr. Duncan.

MRS. BOYD

You and I are in the same boat, aren't we Mr. Duncan. Fifty each.

HELEN

Now you'll have to keep on each getting the same number. It'll be one hundred soon.

MRS. BOYD

Then I'll have to give up my baby. I only meet him once a day now.

MR. DUNCAN

No, count him in, count him in. I'll give him a ten dollar membership right now.

HELEN

Good, good! I'll make out the receipt.

THELMA

When will the case come up, Mr. Duncan?

MR. DUNCAN

In a week probably.

HELEN

Only to think, in a week we shall learn whether this state stands for the poor and oppressed or whether it is willing to give a man over to the mob.

MR. DUNCAN

You ought to argue the case, Miss Helen, instead of our young orator, Edward Marston.

HELEN

*(Awkwardly)* Oh no.

MR. DUNCAN

I believe we have been very fortunate to be able to retain this young man, and I for one appreciate his generosity in refusing any fee. But I do not doubt that you are at the bottom of all this.

HELEN

No, no indeed, I haven't seen Ned—Mr. Marston—since Mr. Smith was arrested.

MRS. ALLEN

*(Bustling over to where Helen is, much to Helen's annoyance)* I have heard, Helen, that you've been very hard



on this young man. You two were too thick though. I reckon to last. (*Helen turns to her work and says nothing.*)

MR. DUNCAN

I have a great admiration for Edward Marston, myself, he is working with the greatest energy on this matter. (*At this moment he is interrupted by the entrance of the Rev. George Todd, a clergyman as one sees at once from his appearance.*)

REV. TODD

Good evening, friends.

HELEN, MRS. C. & MRS. B.

Good evening, Reverend (*They all either speak or nod greetings.*)

MRS. CAMPBELL

How do you think the case is going, Reverend?

REV. TODD

I am not in a position to have any wiser opinion than the rest of you. We all know that the Governor, failing to understand the importance of the case, issued rendition papers for Caesar Smith. We are now trying to secure his freedom by a writ of habeas corpus. Edward Marston is handling the case and I have strong belief in his ability.

MRS. CAMPBELL

What happens if we do secure a writ of habeas corpus?

REV. TODD

The man is then free and will be safe so long as he remains in this State.

HELEN

Oh, if he can only get it. He must not go back South.

MRS. ALLEN

Well, I must be going—not South, but through this city to try to get more N.A.A.C.P. members.

MR. DUNCAN

We must all go, if I am to visit all these people (*holding up a list that Helen has given him.*)

MR. CAMPBELL

*Thelma handing them literature as they go out of door.)*  
Well, I'm off. *(The four who came in go out together,*

THELMA

I ought to go too, oughtn't I, Mrs. Carter? I have the Baptist prayer meeting to cover tonight.

MRS. CARTER

We ought all to go out, for that matter. There are five separate secret societies that Helen and I should reach this evening.

REV. TODD

Why not go and leave me in charge? I have made out receipts for you before.

MRS. CARTER

Oh, would you, Reverend? I'd be so grateful. No one is likely to come in now anyway.

REV. TODD

I shall be delighted to help such charming ladies.

HELEN

You've done no end of things for us already, and we are so grateful to you.

MRS. CARTER

It is a great help to know that there is one church in the city to which we can always turn, and then you preach such splendid N.A.A.C.P. sermons.

REV. TODD

I am glad to contribute my small portion. We must all pull together if we are to rid ourselves of the demon Race Prejudice. *(The three women have been putting papers and tables in order and now stand ready to leave.)*

THELMA

Good-bye Reverend Todd.

HELEN

Good-bye.

REV. TODD

*(To Helen in a low tone)* I've seen a good deal of a certain young gentleman lately and I don't like to think that you are of an unforgiving nature.

*(Helen looks down, shakes her head, but says nothing.)*

REV. TODD

Can't I give him a word of comfort?

*(Helen again shakes her head but then looks up with a smile and runs off. Mrs. Carter brings up the rear, her hands full of books and literature. The Reverend is left alone. He goes to the literature table and lifts up some of the leaflets noting them by name:*

Thirty Years of Lynching,  
A Lynching Uncovered,  
The Chicago Race Riots,  
Mississippi, The American Congo,  
The Arkansas Cases.)

JONES

*(The door opens and the sheriff comes in. He looks just as he looked the night he entered Helen's home)*  
Good evening, Elder.

REV. TODD

*(Looking up startled)* Good evening.

JONES

Thought I'd drop in and see what this little society is that's trying to obstruct the course of justice. *(He goes to the table and picks up the pamphlets. He evidently does not read with great ease for he pours over the titles and gives them out somewhat slowly)* "A Lynching Uncovered," "Thirty Years of Lynching." Look here, what are you doing with books like this. What affair is it of yours how we string a man up. Want to hide the criminal, eh?

REV. TODD

We want to see that justice is done, sir.

JONES

*(Turns over the pamphlet, "An Appeal to the Civilized World," and sees the pictures. He is much interested in*



them, and turning to the Reverend shows him a photograph) See that picture? That's my old friend, Diek Simpson, in there. Reckon he didn't expect ever to get into print like that. (*He speaks with pride at the celebrity given his friend.*)

REV. TODD

His picture has traveled a long way. That pamphlet has been sent all over Europe. People have seen Mr. Dick Simpson's picture in Paris and London, and even over in Japan.

JONES

(*Looking at picture again*) Aint that great! Old Diek Simpson in London. He'll never get there any other way, I reckon. (*Turning sharply to the Reverend*) What you sending the picture over the world for? It aint nobody's business but ours how we settle up with niggers.

REV. TODD

Mr. Sheriff, the man who takes human life has to settle up with his God.

JONES

Dick's a good church member, I know that, never misses a Sunday. He got religion when the preacher came around in our county, oh, back ten years ago. Great preaching that was. I never knew a man who could make you feel hell-fire better. It made you almost sizzle yourself.

REV. TODD

And is your friend escaping hell fire by burning up a black man here on earth?

JONES

What's that? What's that got to do with it?

REV. TODD

It has very much to do with it. The Lord, my friend, is mereiful and graeious, slow to anger. He does not sanction the cruelty shown in this picture here. (*Points to the page where the burning of a Negro is shown*) He tells us to love one another. To be kindly intentioned one to another.

JONES

You're willing to have our white girls raped by dirty black bucks, are you? Think we're going to stand by and see the blacks take over our country, do you?

REV. TODD

As it happened the man whose picture you see, who was burnt to ashes and who suffered the most awful torment that can be given to man, was not charged with touching a woman.

JONES

Wasn't he? (*He looks at picture again*) And there's Bill Ricks, too. Golly did his picture go to England and Paris?

REV. TODD

Yes, sir.

JONES

Let me have this book to take back, Elder.

REV. TODD

These books are for sale, sir.

JONES

How much.

REV. TODD

Fifteen cents.

JONES

(*Pulls out the money and gives it to the other man.*) There you are. It sure was great to have that picture go so far. To Japan you said?

REV. TODD

To Japan and to India also.

JONES

Bill and Dick will sure be surprised. What did they want to see their pictures for anyway?

REV. TODD

They wanted to see how justice was meted out in America.

JONES

(*With bored smile*) Well, they know now. That'll learn 'em. And they'd better not come around our way

if they're nigger lovers, either. We know what to do with folks like that. Tar and feathers makes a pretty dress. (*He drops the books and goes over to the desk where Helen has been working*) Elder, what is this tarnation society? I never thought I'd have run up against a bunch of niggers that'd keep me from getting my man. Why, ef I'd been home they'd have handed him to me as quick as you could shoot off a gun. Is it politics as does it? Is this a Republican society?

REV. TODD

No, this society doesn't belong to any party. Some of the members are Republicans, some Democrats.

JONES

Democrats, why, we don't allow a nigger in the party at home.

REV. TODD

The young lawyer, Edward Marston who will defend Caesar Smith, is a Democrat.

JONES

That young upstart? Ef I had him down South I'd show him where he belonged. That young puppy, daring to think I wouldn't protect my prisoner. I'd find the right tree and use him for a target. Where was you raised?

REV. TODD

In Georgia.

JONES

Well now, what county?

THE REV. TODD

Larchmont.

JONES

That's North, I was raised in Casper County. And we don't let a nigger that's travelling on the train stop for more than two hours. That's the way we manage it.

REV. TODD

How about their going away?

JONES

When they're biggerty we send 'em away at the rope's noose, and the rest, we keep 'em there and treat 'em fine. We all get along fine, whites and niggers, in my county.

REV. TODD

I know most of the Negroes from Georgia in this city. There're just the sort you need down there to make your state rich and prosperous but they wouldn't stay.

JONES

We make 'em stay. Every Georgia nigger in your church knows our terms. Any nigger who lives down my way has got to know first that it is a white man's country. That's first, all other things will be added unto you. Hear me quote scripture!

REV. TODD

So the kingdom of God and the white man's rule in Georgia are the same—and to be sought with equal avidity. (*While he is speaking the door opens and Edward enters abruptly and looking about addresses the minister.*)

EDWARD

Where is Helen?

REV. TODD

She left here a short time ago to go to a meeting of the Knights of Pythias.

EDWARD

Oh, I thought I should see her here.

REV. TODD

She will be back directly.

JONES

A right pretty nigger wench. (*He is chewing a piece of tobacco and his tone and slur anger Edward beyond words. Edward turns on him sharply*)

EDWARD

Get out of here. You have no business in this place!

JONES

(*Amazed*) Are you addressing me, might I ask?

EDWARD

Leave this office. (*The sheriff goes over to Edward and starts to pour the tobacco juice from his mouth unto him. Edward hits him. The sheriff draws a pistol and fires. Edward grabs his left arm, stumbles, falls unconscious into a chair. The sheriff puts his pistol on the table and goes over to Edward.*)

JONES

Only winged you, did I? (*Gives his shoulder a shake but sees that the man is unconscious*) I'll do better for you my fine buck next time. Knock a white man down, will you? (*He turns to go to the table to get his pistol and finds the Reverend has taken it up and is pointing it at him.*)

REV. TODD

Wait a minute, my friend.

JONES

What in the devil — — —

REV. TODD

Although I'm a preacher I know how to use a gun, and I'll use it too if it's necessary. (*The sheriff stares at the pistol and at the Reverend. They are standing opposite one another when the door opens. The sheriff starts to go and runs into the arms of a policeman.*)

POLICEMAN

What's going on here? Who fired that shot?

REV. TODD

Put the handcuffs on him, officer. He has shot and wounded Edward Marston.

POLICEMAN

Keep him covered while I put on the bracelets. (*He dexterously and quickly has the sheriff in handcuffs. In the meantime, Edward has aroused himself enough to move in his chair and turns languidly to see what is happening. He starts up, then grasps his arm with a moan and sinks down again.*)



REV. TODD

Here is the weapon, officer. (*Gives policeman the pistol*) Two minutes ago this man (*pointing to sheriff*) shot, with intent to kill, Mr. Marston. I am ready at any time to tell the whole story.

POLICEMAN

(*Respectfully*) We all know you, Sir. But who's this fellow anyway? (*Points to the sheriff.*)

JONES

I'm a white man, that's what I am, but you're a yellow dog. (*Policeman taking him by the arm, pushes him toward the door so that he nearly falls.*)

POLICEMAN

None of your impudence. I'll call an ambulance for that young man at once. He needs attention.

REV. TODD

(*Goes over to Edward*) My dear boy, are you much in pain?

EDWARD

I don't know, but I'd stand anything but dying to have seen this. In handcuffs, oh my Lord, in handcuffs. (*He grins and then gives a little groan of pain gripping his arm. The Reverend lifts him and putting his arm around his neck the two start for the door.*) In handcuffs, what he meant to put on Caesar Smith. Oh, glory, in handcuffs.

REV. TODD

We'll have that wound dressed in just a minute.

EDWARD

(*Stopping for a second and looking about the room*) I should smile. In handcuffs. Do you get the Reverend? In handcuffs. (*He roars with laughter, then groans with pain. He slowly resumes his walk, then stops again and turning to the audience says*) In handcuffs.

CURTAIN



### ACT III.

SCENE: A court room. The justice is seated with papers and gavel before him. In front of the guard rail running before the bench is a table covered with legal documents and papers. Seated at the table are the stenographer and clerk of the court. Edward, his left arm in a sling, is present as lawyer for the plaintiff. Rev. Todd is on witness stand which is opposite the table and to left of judge. The District Attorney, representing the state of Georgia, is standing before him. Seats for the spectators are to the right of the judge and are all filled. All are listening eagerly. The sheriff, a witness, awaiting to be called, is seated in front of spectators.

(In the audience are many of the people who were in act one, and two persons conspicuous among them are Helen Ray and Fannie Landers. As the curtain rises the Reverend Mr. Todd is testifying.)

REV. TODD

I come from Northern Georgia, your Honor, but it so happened that I preached one Sunday in Cartersville, fifteen miles from where Caesar Smith lived. While staying in Cartersville I saw a lynching within a hundred yards of the church where the day before I had been preaching. It was of a singularly gruesome character. The body was mutilated with hundreds of shots. When I looked down from the church steps I saw certainly thirty men shooting at once. The body hanging from a tree was a target and it seemed to be a matter of sport to find who could strike the bull's eye.

D. ATTORNEY

Did you see the victim these persons were trying to avenge?

REV. TODD

No Sir.

D. ATTORNEY

Mr. Todd, you are a clergyman and a man of God;

it is your duty to preach forgiveness. But if some man here in the streets of Caldwell were to assault and rape your wife, would not every drop of blood in your body call upon you to visit upon the brute instant and awful punishment?

REV. TODD

I cannot answer that question, Sir. I do not know what I might do under such circumstances. But I can say that the question is irrelevant to the story which I have just related. The person lynched had not committed rape.

D. ATTORNEY

He had attempted it.

REV. TODD

No, sir. The person whom I saw lynched in Cartersville, Georgia, and whose body I saw used as a target and riddled with bullets was a woman. *(There is an excited murmur throughout the audience. The judge stares sharply at the reverend gentleman who shows nothing in his face.)*

JUDGE

Did I understand you to say that you saw a woman lynched?

REV. TODD

Yes, your honor.

JUDGE

*(To D. Attorney)* Have you any further questions to ask this man? \*

D. ATTORNEY

No, your honor.

*(The witness steps down.)*

CLERK

William Jones, sheriff of Casper County, State of Georgia, will now take the stand.

*(Sheriff advances in swaggering manner and takes stand. Clerk administers oath, extending Bible to sheriff)*

*who places his left hand upon it, raising his right hand above his head.)*

CLERK

Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but truth, so help you God?

JONES

I do.

*(Clerk again takes his seat at table.)*

D. ATTORNEY

State briefly to the judge, Mr. Jones, for what purpose you have come to Caldwell.

JONES

I have come to this town, your Honor, to arrest a criminal who has escaped from justice. Caesar Smith, of Casper County, Georgia, on March 21 shot and wounded George Cameron. A warrant was at once issued for Caesar as he had fled the county and the state. I, in my position of sheriff, came here to arrest him. And I'd have had him and he would have been in Georgia locked up by this time, if it hadn't been for a lot of interfering, biggerty niggers.

JUDGE

I object to the use of such language in this court.

D. ATTORNEY

Will you state, Mr. Jones, what evidence you have for your belief that Caesar Smith, if turned over to you and taken back to Georgia, would secure a fair and unbiased trial and would be protected from the assault of the mob?

JONES

Such a question, Sir, casts a shadow upon the fair name of the State of Georgia. There is no state in the union where a man can have a fairer trial.

D. ATTORNEY

State to the court what assurance you have that you can keep your prisoner safe from a mob if you return with him.

JONES

(*Puts his hand to his hip and draws out a large revolver. He runs his hand lovingly along it*) I have this, Sir.

JUDGE

Has this man a permit for carrying concealed weapons?

D. ATTORNEY

He has in lieu of his position, Sir.

JUDGE

His position has nothing to do with it. He is under bail for shooting the attorney for the defendant (*nodding his head toward Edward*) and I see him toying with a revolver. (*Nods to Sergeant*) Take away the weapon. (*Sergeant takes away pistol.*)

SHERIFF

(*To the Judge*) Well, your Honor, I have given up two pistols to this blamed old town but I expect them back with my prisoner. If placed in my hands, I can and will defend him with my life.

D. ATTORNEY

Have there been any lynchings in your county since you were sheriff?

JONES

No, Sir.

D. ATTORNEY

Have there ever been any lynchings in Casper County?

JONES

Not that I can remember, Sir.

D. ATTORNEY

Do you recall the lynching of the woman of which the Reverend Mr. Todd spoke?

JONES

I do not, Sir.

D. ATTORNEY

You believe that your State is a safe place for the defendant to return to?

JONES

I do. I do not believe there is a state in the union, Sir, where the Negro is better treated. We like our niggers and treat 'em well.

JUDGE

I have stated that I object to the use of the word "nigger" in this court.

JONES

Yes, Sir. We give 'em food enough to feed a family, when they're old we care for them; when they're dead we bury them. Why, my mammy, Sir, (*There is laughter among the listeners. Goes on rather bewildered at the laughter*) my mammy was the best woman next to my mother I ever knew. I loved her like I loved my mother. When she died she had a stylish funeral. You folks up here don't know what you're talking about when you think we don't like the Negro. (*He pronounces it "Niggro".*)

JUDGE

We are not here to discuss the race question. We are here to decide whether this county shall grant a writ of habeas corpus. Has the sheriff of Casper Co., who is already under indictment for criminal assault upon one of Caldwell's citizens, any further assurance to give us of the safety of his prisoner, if rendition is granted?

JONES

I say I'll protect him with my life and that a Negro is as safe in my state as in any other.

D. ATTORNEY

That is all Mr. Jones. (*Turning to Edward*) Your witness.

EDWARD

(*Rising*) I would like to ask Mr. Jones a question. He will return shortly we will all hope, to his home in Georgia, close to his mammy's grave. If some night, Mr. Jones, I were to walk up to your front door and pounding angrily demand entrance, and if, when the



door was not opened I broke into your home, what would you do? (*Jone's hand goes involuntarily to his hip. There is a ripple of laughter in the court.*)

JONES

I'd aim straighter another time.

EDWARD

Exactly, and that is what Caesar Smith did when his home was forcibly entered.

JONES

You think a nigger, Negro, home is the same as mine?

EDWARD

Not at all, Mr. Jones. You have shown me that it is not, and that it is not entitled to the same protection as the white home in your State. That's all. (*He sits. The sheriff also takes his seat, looking very angry. The lawyer for the defendant is called upon to present his cose. Edward rises again.*)

EDWARD

The facts of the case of the State of Georgia against Caesar Smith are these: On Thursday afternoon, March 21, 1922, a white girl, Dora Court, was attacked on a road in Casper County five miles from Millersville. All efforts to find the guilty person were unavailing. On the following night the home of Caesar Smith, near the scene of the attack on Dora Court, was visited by a band of masked Ku Klux. The leader called upon Smith to open the door. This he refused to do. The crowd then beat upon the door and forced entrance. Smith shot down the first man who came in and leveled his gun at the second, who backed out. Smith succeeded in escaping from his home by a rear entrance and after great suffering and privation found his way to Caldwell. The sheriff of Casper County demands his return for trial on the charge of eriminal assault.

I wish first to point out, your Honor, the laek of justice which has already been shown by the people of Casper County toward Caesar Smith. The sheriff does not state,



and there is not a scintilla of evidence to show, that Smith was guilty of any offense within the law when the Ku Klux came up to his home. There was no evidence that he had attacked the girl. There was talk, instituted by a few disgruntled Negroes, the pitiful type that is always ready to play into the white man's hands, but there was no evidence. Smith, however, was becoming a marked man in his community. He was showing enterprise, thrift, ability to live without the help of the white. He owned his farm, instead, as in the case of most of his neighbors, white and colored, being a share crop tenant. Jealousy was aroused in the minds of those less industrious, less able than he. Then, when there was a chance to attach to him some stigma, his jealous neighbors, masked and armed, went to his house, where they knew him to be alone, intent on bringing him out and killing him on the spot.

As the testimony has shown they tried to enter, and in defending himself Caesar Smith wounded one man. That is all that is against him. Self defense, your Honor, is the first law of nature. That man who finds his home entered by armed, masked men and who fails to defend himself is a craven. Had Smith acted other than he did we should not only pity but fail to respect him. Today we look upon him with respectful eyes, feeling the dignity of his action in repelling the men who tried to invade his home.

The injustice practiced against Caesar Smith up to date does not lead the court to expect that he will be treated with greater consideration if he returns under the protection of the gentleman who has followed him up here. But we have other evidence to show that the likelihood of his falling into the hands of a mob is considerable. I have here the figures of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People for lynching in the State of Georgia. From 1889, when the first records were kept, until 1922, 386 persons were lynched in the State.

JUDGE

Will you give me those figures again?

## EDWARD

I am glad that your honor asks for them, and I do not wonder that you wish to have them again. 386 persons in the past 33 years were lynched in the State of Georgia. This incredible record of lawlessness certainly gives one the right to doubt the assurance of safety given to us by the sheriff of Casper County. Caesar Smith, this gentleman says, is as safe in Georgia as in any other State. And yet in Georgia, within the past sixty days, 9 persons have been taken from the hands of the law, for that is the meaning of lynching, and have been put to death.

Your Honor, the plaintiff has sought refuge here in our State which we all love so well. He has fled here from death at the hands of a masked mob. If the State grants rendition, it turns this man over again to a masked mob. The Ku Klux attempted to organize in this State but thanks to the swift action of the governor they were unable to operate here. They say that they believe in law but they nevertheless take the law into their own hands. They are masked and can do whatever evil they desire without danger of being identified. They have once attacked Caesar Smith. What hope can we entertain that they will not attack him again? This man, Caesar Smith, has a wife and a daughter. He is giving daily thanks that they were away on a visit when his house was attacked.

SMITH

Amen.

EDWARD

Think of it, your Honor. There is no evidence that Smith had any part in the attack upon Dora Court. There never has been any evidence. All the evidence based upon good behavior, industry, thrift, shows Smith to have been a temperate, quiet man, not prone to interfere in others affairs. A man who minded his own business. And yet today his house is in ruins, his wife and child in hiding and he himself in imminent danger, unless justice in this our noble State decrees otherwise, of being taken back and mobbed. Already he has been nearly mobbed by a group of masked men. Everything in the history

of his treatment by his State thus far, shows that he has little to hope for if he is rendered back to it.

I have spoken of the terrible record of lynching in the State of Georgia. Your Honor, in Casper County there was a lynching, although Mr. Jones, the present sheriff, does not recollect it. It is an easy thing for a white man to forget. But for the black man who feels intensely, keenly, the sufferings of his race (*Edward stops for a second and glances at Helen*), for the black man and woman who has sympathy, understanding of the sorrows of the race, such lynchings are unforgettable.

This case that I have in mind occurred fifteen years ago. It began, as so many of these cases begin, in an attack upon a white woman. The South is sparsely settled, its people are ill educated and among both white and black there is much brutality. There is also much passion, and when a white girl was found raped and dead the fury of the whites in this lonely hill section of Casper County was terrible. Someone they felt must be at once punished. They must vent their frenzy upon some being. Cries went up through the hills, "Kill the nigger." Two bloodhounds were put on the trail and without hesitation the animals stopped in front of a white man's door (*a moan comes from the audience. It disturbs Edward for a second but he soon proceeds*). The dogs stopped at a white man's door. There was a feud in this part of the country, and the man at whose house the dogs stopped was known to be a bitter enemy of the father of the girl. He had two sons, lawless fellows both. One of those sons, mark this your Honor, was in that mob. The mob stood looking at the dogs who were sniffing about the doorsill. It was embarrassing to be confronted with a possible white criminal when they were expecting a black one. Hands were on hip pockets. The son of the house had his back to the door. Many curses were heard. Then of a sudden a new group joined the hesitating men. "What are you doing here?" they cried. "Come down to nigger bend. Jerry Landers was seen near the girl this morning." (*Again the moan is heard, but this time more terrible. All look and see that it comes from Fanny Landers who is sitting at Helen's side.*)

EDWARD

Your Honor, those men leaped at the news as starving dogs leap at a bone. They wanted revenge but they wanted to get it easily without trouble. And they raced yelling, screaming, to Jerry Landers' door.

Jerry Landers was an only son and his mother a widow. He was seventeen, uncouth, lazy perhaps, but—

FANNIE LANDERS

*(She has risen, calls out)* No he weren't, he were de bes' boy a mudder eber had. *(Many of the people in the audience rise to their feet. The sheriff is startled, even the judge starts violently.)*

JUDGE

*(To Edward)* Who is this person?

EDWARD

I do not know, your Honor.

FANNIE LANDERS

*(Speaking before Edward finishes and with rapidity)* I's Fannie Landers ob Casper County, Mudder ob dat boy.

CLERK

Order, order.

FANNIE LANDERS

Judge, you listen. I am der mudder ob dat boy. Dey burn him, Sir, dey burn him ter death. I saw de light, de yeller flame in de sky, an' I runned and runned. He was screamin' when I got dar. God, I kin hear him scream now. *(Her voice rises to a scream. Everyone is listening horrified, the judge the keenest of all. She turns and points to the sheriff)* Don't you tink he don' remember. Eberybody 'members. Dere was hunnerds ob 'em watchin' my boy burn. *(Her voice drops very low and sweet)* My boy, my own chile. *(Her voice rises)* Jedge, don' yer let him *(pointing to sheriff)* take dat man down dar. Don' ye hab it on yer heart. Ef yer do at night you'll smell de burning flesh. Don' yer let him go. *(She drops to her seat, Helen supports her. One hears women sobbing in the audience. Men clinch their hands.)*



EDWARD

*(He has been standing through this outbreak)* Your honor, I rest my case here. *(Sits.)*

D. ATTORNEY

*(Rises)* Your Honor, appearing for the plaintiff, the State of Georgia, I wish to present certain facts showing that the writ of habeas corpus should be denied. First:

*(While he is speaking the curtain falls.)*

## ACT IV.

SCENE: *The same as act 1. Evening of the same day. In the room are Helen, Thelma and Beatrice. The table is set for a business meeting, Helen's secretary's book on it. But it is also full of papers which the girls are excitedly reading. Outside you hear the call of "Extra, Extra, full account of the Extradition case. Judge rebukes Georgia sheriff. Extradition refused. Extra, Extra"* (some of the words lost as the boys shout them). *Helen, Thelma and Beatrice are all reading the papers and reading aloud bits they particularly like.*

HELEN

Thelma, just listen to what the GOVERNOR says: It is evident from the action of the sheriff in shooting without reasonable provocation our respected citizen Edward Marston, one of the outstanding youths of promise of the colored race—

THELMA

*(Who bursts in with her reading when Helen has reached the name of Edward Marston)* It is rumored that the extraordinary moment of the trial when a mother whose son had been burned at the stake rose to her feet—

HELEN

*(interrupting when Thelma has reached the word 'son')* We are proud of our colored lawyer and hope that he will always remain a citizen of our State. Young men of color like this are an asset to the nation.

THELMA

*(Who has interrupted at word 'State' with:)* And made her impassioned plea. This was all staged beforehand.

BEATRICE

Girls do read one at a time. We know that spiel about Edward, Helen, he deserves every bit of it, but I want to know whether you knew that Fannie Landers had had a son lynched? *(At this moment Cyril and Edward enter and remain in the background.)*

HELEN

Yes, I did.

CYRIL

*(Stepping forward)* Well, I congratulate you, Helen. That was the greatest thing I ever saw pulled off. You had better give up teaching and write for the movies.

HELEN

No, don't put it like that. I didn't stage anything. I didn't even give Edward the story. He got it out of "Thirty Years of Lynching in the U. S." I just took Fannie to the court and left the rest to fate.

EDWARD

You won the case all right.

HELEN

Nonsense.

BEATRICE

*(Edward and Helen are a little embarrassed as they meet and Beatrice bursts in with her speech to make things a little less embarrassing)* Helen's been reading all the bouquets the governor has thrown to you, Edward. I expect he'll soon resign in your favor.

EDWARD

I'm expecting it every day. What job were you looking for Beatrice?

BEATRICE

Well, Ministress to the court of St. James.

EDWARD

You didn't say I was to be President. *(All laugh. The rest of the club who were present at the first act have entered except John.)*



ALBERT

How are you, Helen? What a wonder you are! They say you got Fannie Landers to make her speech.

EDWARD

If you win any more cases I shant dare to speak to you when we meet.

ALBERT

Girls, what do you think, Caesar Smith is going to work for old Mr. Thompson, don't you know, the soap man who has that enormous house on Grant Avenue.

THELMA

When did you hear this?

ALBERT

Just a few minutes ago. Mr. Thompson is a personal friend of the governor's and it seems the governor asked him if he couldn't find a place on his estate and of course he found the place. (*John enters. He has a paper in his hand.*)

JOHN

Hear what the Afro-American Journal says (*Reads*) 'It is stated that Will Jones, sheriff of Casper County, will come up for trial in the shooting of Edward Marston before Judge Stanley. If he does, his chances for a light sentence are slim. The more the sheriff swore today the angrier the judge looked.

CYRIL

Yes, Judge Stanley wouldn't stand for swearing.

JOHN

(*Still reading*) It looks as though the tables will be reversed from what the sheriff expected. Instead of Caesar Smith's returning to be incarcerated in Georgia, Will Jones will be incarcerated in our State. (*Beatrice has gone to the victrola and has put in a needle. It begins to play.*)

EDWARD

No, Trix, please, we're not ready for dancing yet.

BEATRICE

No?

EDWARD

(*Smiling, but firm*) No, the Caldwell Club has turned over a new leaf. After this it will be business first, and pleasure afterwards. We're all here, aren't we? Just the crowd that met a month ago. I call the meeting to order. (*Beatrice stops record.*) Will the secretary read the minutes of the last meeting? (*They all take their seats and the business begins.*)

CYRIL

I move we dispense with the reading of the minutes.

BEATRICE

I second the motion.

EDWARD

How do you feel about this motion, Madame Secretary?

HELEN

As there weren't any minutes of any account, you can easily dispense with them.

EDWARD

The motion before you is to dispense with the reading of the minutes of the last meeting. All in favor will say 'aye'. (*All vote aye.*)

EDWARD

All opposed, 'No'. (*There are no Noes.*) The motion to dispense with the reading of the minutes is carried. I will now call for a committee report. Will the committee appointed to consider the advisability of joining the N.A.A.C.P. drive bring in its report. The committee consisted of Thelma, Cyril and our secretary. Who was made chairman?

THELMA.

Cyril.

EDWARD

I see you are not feminists. You appointed a man to do the work.

HELEN

No, we didn't. We appointed the man for the place of honor and the secretary, Thelma, did the work.

CYRIL

*(With a grimace)* That's feminism all right. Keep at it, put me where I belong.

THELMA

Report, Cyril, you know what we have done.

CYRIL

No, Madame Secretary, you are the one to report. You have done the work. *(He sits, and while he tries to look aggrieved he is really delighted.)*

THELMA

*(Risis)* Fellow members of the Caldwell Social Club, you can all make this report. You know that after we left Helen that night she started in on the most exciting piece of work that the colored people of Caldwell have ever done. The N.A.A.C.P. Branch at once took up Caesar Smith's case and there wasn't any question of our joining the branch or the drive. Nothing could have kept us out. Cyril, Helen, John and I became lieutenants and we brought in in all 234 new members. *(There is a round of applause)* But besides this, it was our club that furnished the legal council and I bet we're all more proud than we can ever say of the way Ned Marston argued that case. Not only that, he let himself get shot by the sheriff just to strengthen it. You may find it uncomfortable to have your arm in a sling, Ned, but it was a great help with the judge and the governor. Well, there's not much more to say. We've been congratulated by headquarters and we've really, I think, done a pretty good job. *(She sits down by Cyril amid applause and says aside to him)* You ought to have made the speech. I forgot everything I wanted to say.

EDWARD

Do I hear a motion to have the report accepted.

CYRIL

I move its acceptance.

JOHN

*(Slowly)* I second the motion and thank the committee.

EDWARD

We will add that to the motion. Are you ready for the question. All in favor will say 'Aye'. (*There is a roar of ayes.*) There is no one left to say No. The motion, Madame Secretary is unanimously carried. (*To Helen*) Have you any further business?

HELEN

I have a communication from headquarters.

EDWARD

Let us hear it.

HELEN

(*Reading letter*)

NATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR THE ADVANCEMENT OF  
COLORED PEOPLE  
70 Fifth Ave.  
New York, N. Y.

Miss Helen Ray, Secretary

Caldwell Social Club

My dear Madam:

I write to extend to you our hearty thanks for the admirable work which your club has done during the spring membership drive. Through the efforts of your members we have received 234 new members, thirty of them gold and ten silver certificates. We hope that the young people in other sections of the country where we have branches will follow your example and help us in our efforts to bring justice to the American Negro.

Very truly yours,  
James Weldon Johnson, Secretary.

EDWARD

That shows not only that we did good work but that we turned it in in fine shape to the National Office. The sum they state agrees exactly with Thelma's figures. Is there any further business? If not, your president has something he would like to say. (*Edward rises and speaks quietly and earnestly, in contradistinction to his manner at the former meeting.*)

When we met here last time I made a rotten talk. I

want to take it all back. I said a lot about this club being just a place for a good time and that if a man looked after himself and his family and got a job occasionally for a friend.—

JOHN

Hear! hear!

EDWARD

That was all that should be expected of him. I don't feel that way now.

JOHN

Going to get us all two jobs?

EDWARD

(*Making his point swiftly*) Yes, two, one for himself and one for his race. I tell you, Caesar Smith has been an eye-opener to a lot of us. We've got to keep busy if we want to have the race survive, just survive. And we here in the North have got to fight the battle Smith couldn't fight.

CYRIL

Oh, yes, he did fight.

EDWARD

You're right there, he did fight, and escaped with his life and that would have been taken from him if we hadn't fought with him. But we, here, why we can fight without endangering our lives and we ought to do it. I've been reading a lot of stuff since I took up this case, N.A.A.C.P. stuff that I never would bother looking at before, and I see that we haven't got any too much backbone about the things in the North. We let them shove us out of the best seats in the theatres and growl and that ends it. And we don't dare go into a restaurant for a meal though the law expressly says we can have one if we insist on it. We're too, too —

CYRIL

Lazy.

EDWARD

No—(*hesitating*) I don't think its exactly laziness, we're too, well, we're too respectable, I guess that's about



the amount of it. We can't bear to make ourselves conspicuous. We'd rather swallow a little pride than have a row. But the point is the row isn't for ourselves, it's for the whole of us, it's for the race. If we're free, really free here in the North, it won't be so easy to enslave Caesar Smith in the South.

Well, gentlemen of the jury, I don't intend to make a speech. You see I've made a resolve. I'm going to work for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. Fannie Lander's cry in the court room will be with me as long as I live. (*They all look very serious*) When I started to tell that story I never knew the boy was her son. But I haven't forgotten it. It's the kind of thing that sticks with you, that you take to bed with you at night. And we've got to stand by her and Smith, and all the people of our race who are suffering just because they happen to be born black. We can't turn our backs on them, I can't; none of you can. (*He sits down. The young people have grown very serious.*)

CYRIL

(*Rises*) I bet we all feel exactly as Ned does and we mean to join in with him right here in this club and take up whatever he thinks we had better do. I suppose he'd — — (*There is a loud shouting from the streets. The girls and some of the boys jump up. Beatrice gets to the door first and from the hall calls back.*)

BEATRICE

Come on, come, there's a procession. (*There is a sound of a band and cries of hooray, hooray!*)

THELMA

What is it?

JOHN

Sounds to me like a lot of Elks or Pythians.  
(*They all run into the hall and you hear*)

CYRIL

Say, Thelma, did you know there was to be a procession?



THELMA

No, indeed.

JANE

I didn't.

JOHN

Shall we go?

ALBERT

Let's either go or stay.

CYRIL

Here's your coat, Thelma.

ALBERT

Come along, there's Caesar Smith.

*(The door shuts. Edward and Helen are left alone.)*

EDWARD

Want to go, Helen?

HELEN

I'm in no hurry.

*(They are standing by the table. Helen's eyes are downcast. You hear the band in the distance.)*

EDWARD

I love to hear a band, don't you?

HELEN

Yes. You can run to it if you like.

EDWARD

You know what I like.

Don't you think, Helen, dear, the best part of having a quarrel is making it up? *(Helen nods her head but does not look up)* I'm willing to admit that you were right, at least, most right. I think you called me pretty hard names?

HELEN

I did.

EDWARD

But I was a rotter. *(He takes her engagement ring from his pocket and puts it on the table near her hand.)*

*She moves her fingers to it and slips it on, but still she does not look at him.)*

EDWARD

I thought I was happy a month ago, but now! (*He has moved and has one arm about her*) We've got an awful lot to do, Helen.

HELEN

Yes!

EDWARD .

All the cruelty, all the race prejudice, all the silliness —

HELEN

You expect to attack it?

EDWARD

I expect to fight it from this day on, and you will fight it too, dear. Oh, my child, you have a great deal to do.

HELEN

(*Looking up for the first time, with a mischievous smile*) I realize that Edward. I shall have to look after you.

(*They slip into one another's arms. You still hear the band in the distance.*)

CURTAIN.



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